



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC 20554

Brendan Carr
Commissioner

April 20, 2022

Mr. Tim Cook
Chief Executive Officer
Apple Inc.

Dear Mr. Cook,

Last week, you gave a speech in Washington, D.C., in which you spoke eloquently about what you described as Apple's commitment to operating its App Store in a manner that promotes privacy and human rights. You expressed Apple's "commitment to protecting people from a data industrial complex built on a foundation of surveillance." And you spoke out forcefully against a reality in which "technology is exploited to rob humanity of that which is foundational" as "a loss we cannot accept." I am concerned that your words in Washington founder upon the harsh reality of your actions in China.

Indeed, at the very same time that you were speaking in D.C. about your App Store policies promoting privacy and human rights, your company was continuing its well documented campaign in Beijing of aggressively censoring apps at the behest of the Communist Party of China. In fact, as the *New York Times* previously reported, "Mr. Cook often talks about Apple's commitment to civil liberties and privacy. But to stay on the right side of Chinese regulators, his company has put the data of its Chinese customers at risk and has aided government censorship in the Chinese version of its App Store." Or as the Asia director for Amnesty International once put it: "Apple has become a cog in the censorship machine that presents a government-controlled version of the internet. . . . If you look at the behavior of the Chinese government, you don't see any resistance from Apple — no history of standing up for the principles that Apple claims to be so attached to."

In your speech last week, you stated that "technology is neither inherently good nor inherently bad. . . . It is a mirror that reflects the ambitions and intentions of . . . the people who build it." So what does Apple's decision to use its technology to engage in censorship on behalf of Communist China reflect about your company? Does it represent the commitment you expressed last week "to advocate on behalf of our users and what they deserve"?

While there are many examples of Apple doing the bidding of Communist China—including its decisions to remove Quran and Bible apps—I am focusing in this letter on just one case: Apple's decision to remove the Voice of America mobile app from its App Store in China. Apple's decision to appease the Communist Party of China—an authoritarian regime that the State Department has determined is committing genocide and crimes against humanity—cannot be squared with your representation in Washington that Apple will "battle against an array of

dangerous actors” nor your claim that Apple will “protect[] people’s fundamental rights” from abusive surveillance.

I am writing to you now because I only recently learned that Apple blocks the Voice of America mobile app from its App Store in China. And I find Apple’s conduct in this regard deeply troubling, particularly given your words last week. Voice of America is part of the U.S. Agency for Global Media, which is funded by Congress. Voice of America operates by statute as an objective, independent voice when it comes to its reporting and content. Its first principle says it all: “VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news.”

Indeed, Voice of America, which began its operations in 1942, now operates as a multiplatform news service—offering both online and broadcast content—that provides news and information in more than 40 languages to hundreds of millions of people across the globe. The Voice of America mobile app is one of its most recent innovations, which allows smartphone users to access unfiltered news content. The Voice of America app also safeguards user privacy by including built-in support for circumvention technologies. As such, it can be an important tool for those that want access to news and information uncensored by authoritarian regimes—unless, of course, you are an iPhone user in China.

For years, global corporations like Apple have cut deals with brutal regimes like Communist China in exchange for access to a large and lucrative market. Of course, these corporations advance all sorts of reasonable sounding arguments to justify their decisions to stand shoulder to shoulder with authoritarians. We commonly hear refrains along the lines of it’s better that we’re there to give people a taste of freedom than exit the market entirely. Or, as you stated in 2017, that it is better for a company to show up and participate “because nothing ever changes from the sideline.” But these profit-driven arguments run headlong into real world experience.

China is not becoming more open or bending towards freedom because Apple is doing business there. Far from it. China is cracking down on individual liberty at an accelerating clip. Look at Hong Kong. Look at Xinjiang. Or look at the reports purporting to link Apple’s supply chain to Uyghur forced labor. Continuing to partner with brutal regimes like Communist China only provides them with tacit—if not explicit—support and emboldens those bad actors. It provides them with a veneer of openness and legitimacy, while allowing them to surveil individuals and limit their human rights.

Particularly for a company like Apple that professes to value human rights and “battle” dangerous actors, as you stated last week, it is past time to stand up for those values—not just in words in Washington but through deeds in Beijing. Indeed, I would encourage Apple to evaluate its overall relationship with China, particularly its extensive manufacturing operations there, to ensure that these relationships reflect the global values Apple voices.

For now, though, I am writing with a straight-forward request. Please provide a response to this one question by April 29, 2022: Will Apple allow access to the Voice of America mobile

app through its App Store in China, consistent with the fundamental human rights that you articulated in your speech?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Carr', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brendan Carr